Editorial Offices Move

At its inception ***Early Modern Japan*** began as an informal newsletter, edited, prepared and published at the Department of History, Ohio State University. Shortly after its inception, ***Oboegaki*** (as it was then known) moved to the editorship of Mark Ravina of the Department of History, Emory University. For the past several years Mark has shepherded ***Early Modern Japan***, editing, formatting, soliciting contributions, handling mailings, subscriptions, and all of the miscellaneous chores associated with getting any publication out. Although later joined by Lawrence Marceau as Book Review Editor, Mark has born the brunt of the work. We are sure we are not alone in expressing our gratitude for the time and effort that Mark has put into developing ***Early Modern Japan*** during this time.

Mark has, however, decided to turn his attention to new projects and consequently, the editorial offices and responsibilities for ***Early Modern Japan*** have returned to Ohio State University. Chief editorial responsibilities now rest with Philip C. Brown. Lawrence Marceau continues as Book Review Editor.

Hard copy submissions of article manuscripts (scholarly essays, research notes, discussions of pedagogical issues, reports of general interest on professional issues and the like) should be sent to:

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Everyday Things in Premodern Japan: Two Views

Susan B. Hanley, *Everything Things in Premodern Japan: The Hidden Legacy of Material Culture* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1997, xiv plus 213 pages. $35.00

Editor's Note: Customary practice dictates that an academic journal devote only one review for each book received. That has also been the practice here at EMJ, however, we decided to include the two reviews that follow because we felt the differences in perspective that they offered would be of interest to our readers. We would be very interested in readers' reactions to this exploratory effort and we would be open to suggestions for other books that you feel might merit similar treatment.

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Modernization Theory Redux?

Anne Walthall, University of California, Irvine

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Japanese people enjoyed a level of physical well being comparable to Europe and the United States, or so argues Susan Hanley. Furthermore, this proposition holds whether the comparison is with these societies at similar stages of development or at the same point in time. Measured in terms of life expectancy (which is quantifiable) and comfort (a value judgment) rather than per capita income, physical well-being comprises such issues as quality of housing, bedding and clothing, sanitation, diet, and nutrition. Indeed, Japan did so well in these areas that it saw no need to make substantive changes in order to industrialize. This stability in terms of material culture is at least as important in explaining Japan's industrialization as the economic and commercial developments already so carefully analyzed by a number of historians.

With these claims, Hanley stakes out a field that, while already widely exploited in studies of the west, has been little explored in the case of Japan, especially in western languages, with the exception of her own work. Even though she draws considerably on what she has done before, her article in The Cambridge History of Japan has been largely reshaped, her essay on sanitation has been expanded, her demographic study has been condensed, and her discussion of the continuity in material culture across the nineteenth century has

been reformulated to fit within her stated aim of tracing the ways in which the standard of living and the level of physical well-being rose throughout the Tokugawa period and provided the essential platform for a smooth transition to an industrialized economy.

Unlike economic historians who end up frustrated in their efforts to measure levels of income owing to a lack of reliable data for premodern societies, Hanley focuses on evidence of consumption. She points to the importance of wartime advances in technology for the development of better housing, clothing and food, first during the Sengoku period, then the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars at the turn of the twentieth century. Following pacification in the first instance, the cutting and placing of foundation stones, originally developed as a technique to strengthen castle walls, gave rise to houses that were more symmetrical and sturdier than their predecessors. The *shoin* style characterized by built-in writing desks, *tokonoma*, wooden flooring, *tatami* and shoji spread first throughout the samurai class then the rest of the population, resulting in lighter, airier, cleaner and more comfortable dwellings. An increasing variety of consumer goods led by the spread of cotton for clothing and bedding created the need for chests, storehouses and closets. Nevertheless, the Japanese never developed the taste for wall-to wall furnishings and elaborate clothing that characterized Victorian England for example, but used resources economically and flexibly. Not only did the variety of foods expand during the Tokugawa period (including meat), cooking methods changed from the single-pot stew to rice with side dishes. Food, clothing, sleeping arrangements, water supply, waste removal and bathing all contributed to better health. By limiting the size of their families, the Japanese were able to enjoy these benefits from one generation to the next.

Hanley admits that her evidence is sketchy, and given the newness of her field, this is not surprising. With the exception of the chapter on demography, much of the text synthesizes work by Japanese scholars. Indeed, one of the book's strengths is its ability to take evidence from a range of sources and blend it together into a seamless and coherent argument without getting bogged down in details. Scholars will be certain to quibble over her interpretations, as do I, but the fact remains that the book is well worth reading and certain to stimulate new avenues of inquiry.

It is my hope that subsequent studies of material culture in Tokugawa Japan will develop a more stimulating conceptual framework than the modernization thesis that underpins this book. Hanley insists that she wants to counter the assumption that Tokugawa Japan was "backward," yet nowhere does she cite a source less than twenty years old that makes this claim. In many ways it is unfortunate that the richness of her data has been coerced into an argument that sees what contributed to Japan's eventual ability to industrialize as good and ignores everything else. Peasants built larger sturdier houses on foundation stones outfitted with *tokonoma*, *shoji*, and *oshiire* not so that their descendants could adapt to changing times in the late nineteenth century but to overawe their neighbors and impress their friends as well as make life more comfortable for themselves. For the wealthy peasants and rural entrepreneurs who could afford these accouterments, a house was not just a place to live but constituted social and cultural capital that, along with the writing of w*aka*, the practice of tea ceremony and the performance of Noh, served as a marker of distinction in local society in ways that were not necessarily conducive to modern social relations. Rather than trying to convince economic historians that the level of physical well being is as worthy of consideration as income distribution, one approach to the study of material culture might be to draw on the recent work in cultural history being done by people such as Lynn Hunt and Robert Lumley.[1]

The commitment to the modernization thesis as a conceptual framework means that Hanley consistently looks to Europe and the United States as her point of reference. In her conclusion (p. 188) she raises the issue of comparing Japan's level of well-being with that of the rest of Asia, and China in particular, only to dismiss it owing to a paucity of data. Yet earlier in the book she suggests that China had developed more advanced building techniques for private residences than had Japan (pp. 29, 31). China, like Japan (and probably earlier) was the only country in Asia with enough interest in food to publish cookbooks (p. 83). Even though she praises Japan's lack of central heating for being resource efficient, heating the floor as in Korea or a raised bedding area as in China has to yield more physical comfort than huddling around a *kotatsu*. For some contemporary economic historians, especially those dealing in world history, the really

[1] Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Robert Lumley, ed., *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Culture on Display* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

interesting issue is not whether and how Japan was like Europe, but the surprisingly numerous ways in which it resembled China. This is an area in which a student of comparative material cultures could make an out-standing contribution.

Hanley also remains tied to the same argument she made in 1977 regarding the prevalence of infanticide in the Japan and its role in slowing population growth. She is still convinced that fertility rates must have been significantly higher than the population registers show; therefore people must have been limiting the size of their families. Furthermore, this was done deliberately, not only through delaying age of marriage but also through abortion and infanticide. The aim was to improve the family's standard of living by eliminating those children who could not contribute to its economic well being over the long run. Yet disaggregating population levels by region shows that the considerable growth in western Japan has been masked by population declines in Tohoku as well as near cities (a point Hanley herself concedes). In an article too recent for Hanley to have incorporated it into her book, Laurel L. Cornell demonstrates that the assumptions demographers have made regarding maximum fertility rates are much too high for premodern societies.[2] Some years ago Ann Jannetta pointed out that smallpox, endemic during the Tokugawa period, can reduce male fertility by up to 50 percent.[3] Since smallpox is on the point of eradication world wide, using fertility rates in contemporary populations where it is presumably not present as a standard for measuring growth in past centuries is problematic. Furthermore, social practices such as working away from home need to be taken into account. No one can argue that infanticide was unknown in Tokugawa Japan. Whether it was performed as systematically as Hanley implies with the intent to improve not a family's chances of survival but its standard of living is more debatable and adds little to the book's basic argument.

There are other points that might be raised regarding the role of social pressure in limiting family size. I found it unconvincing to state on page 39 and elsewhere that commoners easily circumvented sumptuary regulations regarding the size and furnishing of their dwellings (though no mention is made of the eaves, walls and gates that were the jealously guarded prerogative of the village elite and led to many a village dispute over status distinctions), yet on page 138 to argue that these same commoners accepted government regulation and social control when it came to the number of children they would raise. That implies that the Tokugawa system of governance was more effective in enforcing this social policy than present-day China. It can be argued, furthermore, that society frowned on large families only for those who could not afford them. Tokugawa Ienari (1773-1841) proudly had 55 children, and among the rural entrepreneurs of the Ina valley, raising seven, ten, or eleven children was not uncommon. Demographic studies need to take social status and well as economic class into account.

Given that this review is aimed at specialists of early modern Japan, I would like to pick at one nit regarding names. On page 86, Hanley refers to a Suzuki Makiyuki who wrote about the Nagano area in 1827. Having once made this same mistake myself, I assume she is referring to Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842) whose ethnographic account of the snow country contains much information on material culture.[4] On page 113 she cites an article by Itô Kôichi, and then on page 119 another by Itô Yoshiichi. If I am not mistaken, they are one and the same person. With those exceptions and a typographical error or two, the book is remarkably well produced. It is compact and crammed with the kind of detail that can spice up a lecture. Because it is well written in easily accessible language, a more general audience might enjoy reading it for fun and profit.

A Book for Believers?

Lee Butler, Brigham Young University

Dominated as it has been by economic materialists, the study of Tokugawa history in postwar Japan has been surprisingly narrow--at least up until the last decade or so. The dramatic shift toward social history that occurred in postwar scholarship produced in and about the

[2] Laurel L. Cornell, "Infanticide in Early Modern Ja-pan? Demography, Culture and Population Growth," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.1 (February 1996): 22-50.

[3] Ann Bowman Jannetta, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 189.

[4] Suzuki Bokushi, *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Oth-er Japan* trans. by Jeffrey Hunter with Rose Lesser (New York: Weatherhill, 1986); Anne Walthall, "Peri-pheries: Rural Culture in Tokugawa Japan" *Monu-menta Nipponica* 39.4 (Winter 1984): 371-392.